

**EDITORIAL**  
**REFLECTIONS**  
**ON THE**  
**1968**  
**ACT**

## **50th Anniversary of the Social Work Scotland Act 1968: Reflections on the 1968 Act – An Editorial**

Every day in Scotland, social workers are making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of individuals, families and communities. While society has changed significantly in the past fifty years, the role for social work remains as important as ever as a central public service delivered across the statutory, not-for-profit and private sectors. The passing of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 heralded a commitment by central and local government to provide a comprehensive and community oriented social work service, focused on providing early help, working in partnership with the communities served, and prepared and empowered to act to protect the vulnerable and those in crisis. These objectives are as important today, as they were in 1968.

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 both at the time, and today, is considered to be a landmark piece of legislation which brought social work professionals from different fields of practice together within new local authority social work departments. It consolidated legislation for children and adults in need, and probation, and aimed to effect change at both an individual and community level. The Act also created the Children’s Hearing System that aimed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people through a decision making lay tribunal called the Children’s Panel.

As the professional leadership body for social work, Social Work Scotland wanted to use the opportunity of the 50th anniversary of the 1968 Act to reflect upon what the Act has achieved, and what it still has to offer as we look forward. The result is a collaborative project between Social Work Scotland, Scottish Government and the profession reflecting one of the hallmarks of social work in Scotland – partnership. It involves seven specially commissioned papers that seek to look at the achievements of the Act, and to draw out the lessons for the future. In doing so, this publication is seeking to pause and reflect on where social work in Scotland has come from, and where it can build upon the successes to date as it faces both the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow. Social work has always operated in a context of change and challenge, and yet the need of wider society for social work is just as pertinent today as it was in the lead up to the 1968 Act.

The first contribution, by Brigid Daniel and Jane Scott, provides a wonderful overview of the social and economic drivers which informed and shaped the 1968 Act. The paper combines a comprehensive review of the literature relating to social work's development over the last fifty years, with extracts from interviews with people who have been part of that journey. Its key message is summed up by one interviewee who observes that 'social work has the ability to re-define itself, which means that it can look forward.'

Adopting a more focussed lens, Eccles and Taylor provide an excellent analysis of personalisation, drawing connections between some of the ambitions of the 1968 Act and contemporary personalisation policy and practice. They identify important 'resonances' between the two frameworks but urge caution and an applied lens. The authors urge particular attention to how personalisation is playing out in changing social and organisational contexts.

The next paper explores related themes with a focus on community-based social work. Rawcliffe observes that social work's emphasis on the collective, the preventative and the structural dimensions of social welfare were short lived, as social work in Scotland became subject to similar redefinitions as occurred across the UK. Notwithstanding, Rawcliffe points to 'several small streams' which speak to the radical legacy of the 1968 Act and which, in her view, offer a key to recovering social work's capacity for social change. Scott, Lowe, Cavanan and Simpson examine social work's response to financial hardship and in particular the changing use of cash assistance for families. The authors trace the persisting impacts of poverty on families in Scotland while finding that cash assistance plays a reduced role in social work support. However, the findings indicate that access to cash assistance remains significant for families and is often used to provide food and clothes for their children, an emphasis that does not feature in early accounts of the use of financial support in Scotland.

The remaining three papers speak to particular areas of practice while continuing to apply a comparative lens. Vaswani, Dyer and Lightowler tell the important story of youth justice in Scotland. Recognising that Kilbrandon set in motion clear principles for youth justice policy and practice the authors observe that principles only take us so far, particularly in spaces of conflict. They propose a step change in responses to children in conflict with the law, set within a framework of children's rights. Continuing the justice theme, Cree, Kirkwood, McCulloch and Mullins provide a stimulating analysis of gender in criminal justice social work (CJSW) prompted by the, then, contentious merger of probation and social

work services. Their findings highlight and disrupt gendered representations of CJSW, then and now, and invite more complex analyses of the role of gender in CJSW and social work more broadly. Last, Critchley, Cowan, Grant and Hardy examine the changing territory of adoption practice and social work's role within that. The authors highlight important and familiar themes including the challenge of delivering person-centred practice within an increasing fragmented service delivery landscape.

Together, this collection of work speaks to a forward-facing profession that continues to demand more for the people and communities it serves, even in the face of significant challenges. It also speaks to a profession committed to practice underpinned by robust knowledge and critique, collaborative relationships and a strong value base. These 'golden threads' run through our professional history and, in our view, show no signs of unravelling.

**Jackie Irvine** President, Social Work Scotland  
**Iona Colvin** Chief Social Work Advisor

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## Reflections on the 1968 Act – Report Summaries

### **Personalisation: Back to the Future?**

Andrew Eccles *University of Strathclyde* and  
Raymond Taylor *North Lanarkshire Council*

Personalisation is now established in policy circles as a key element in the future of social work practice. By implication, the policy rubric suggests a return to aspects of relational practice, drawing on community strengths and affording the opportunity for social workers to think imaginatively and use discretion. These are also hallmarks of the 1968 Social Work Scotland Act. This paper explores if personalisation in practice does indeed have resonance with the 1968 Act. Social work historiography highlights the pitfalls of making broad assumptions about previous eras, so the approach here involved a small scale, but in-depth, set of interviews with participants who had practiced social work in the early stages of the Act's implementation after 1968. Participants also had familiarity with the personalisation agenda. The paper starts with a review of tensions in personalisation policy, which have been discussed in the critical literature, and which underpinned our research enquiry. The findings of the enquiry suggest there are some resonances from the 1968 Act in aspects of current personalisation practice. However the changes in the social and organisational landscape across the intervening decades suggests these need to be viewed with caution. The current scope of social work engagement, significant changes in communities (and political engagement with these communities), the advent of regulatory and inspection frameworks, and the procedures for resource allocation all indicate that connexions to past practice are, beyond a sometimes shared terminology, complex to maintain, and suggest further that these are areas that might be reflected on in current personalisation practice.

### **A radical current? Community and its relation to social work since 1968**

Sue Rawcliffe *Independent Researcher*

The idea of a universal, community-based service was key to the vision of social work that informed the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act. In the intervening 50 years did such a vision come to represent a radical, critical current within social work theory and practice in Scotland or did it remain largely aspirational? This paper draws on survey, interview and focus group data collected from current and past practitioners to consider this question. It argues that the aspirations for the 1968 Act can be seen as radical and

far reaching and for a time community-based approaches enjoyed a role in the mainstream. This was, however, short lived and social work in Scotland became subject to similar redefinition as the rest of the UK. While this might have seen the disappearance of a current that focused on the collective, the preventative and the wider structural determinants of people's lives, several small streams continued to flow. These provided an alternative, critical vision for social work that drew on ideas of community. They can be seen as an important legacy of the Social Work (Scotland) Act that are in danger of being lost. Reconnecting to them, in our current historical context may be key to social work regaining the passion and belief in social change that informed the Act and the early days of our profession.

## **Prevention or crisis response? Social work response to financial hardship**

Jane Scott *Independent Researcher*, Jean Lowe, Martin Canavan  
Aberlour and Clare Simpson *Parenting Across Scotland*

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 provided a framework for the newly formed social work profession and took a social welfare approach to those who needed support. It introduced Section 12 (s.12), which allowed social workers the discretion to use cash assistance in its work with children and adults for use in emergencies, for preventative and for promotional social work; cash assistance was seen as the resource of a comprehensive Social Work Department. The Act envisaged that its provisions, including s.12, would help those on the edge of care and be a protective measure to prevent children being taken into care. The use of cash assistance within social work, however, was not without controversy.

Fifty years on, this small scale study explored the role of financial assistance today from statutory and third sector services through examining the original policy intention of s.12, whether use of cash assistance had changed over time and whether it currently played a role in addressing poverty. The study gathered data through a small scale review of the literature and discussions with practitioners with experience of working in both the statutory and third sectors, and with a small number of parents. In the early years of implementation, cash assistance was primarily used for to help individuals and families pay for their fuel and rent, but today parents are using the support of cash assistance predominantly to buy food to feed their families.

## **What is youth justice? Changing priorities, roles and perceptions since Kilbrandon**

Nina Vaswani, Fiona Dyer and Claire Lightowler *Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice*

The Kilbrandon committee was established in 1961 in response to concerns about rising levels of youth crime. Reporting in 1964, the committee observed that the needs of children in conflict with the law did not differ from the needs of children who required welfare and protection and proposed that these needs should be met through a single system. In a radical shake up of the youth justice system, this proposal was enacted in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, and the first Children's Hearing took place in 1971. This paper draws upon archival records, literature, data, media reports and testimony from policymakers and practitioners in order to chart the development of youth justice since that time. It describes policy and practice change since then that has been slow and incremental, rather than radical. And while the legacy of Kilbrandon has been a clear and strong set of principles acting as a beacon to guide both policy and practice, an unintended legacy is the often erroneous assumption that, because of Kilbrandon, Scotland is getting it right for children in conflict with the law. The paper documents the fact that, even with the best of intentions, policy and practice do not always adhere to such admirable principles when things get challenging. Inspired by Kilbrandon, the authors propose that the time is right for a big step change in how Scotland responds to children who are in conflict with the law, by genuinely and completely rooting the youth justice response in children's rights.

## **Criminal Justice Social Work: Exploring gender issues**

Prof Vivienne Cree, Dr Steve Kirkwood *The University of Edinburgh*, Ms Dr Trish McCulloch *The University of Dundee*, and Eve Mullins *The University of Edinburgh*

This study explores gender in criminal justice social work (CJSW) in Scotland, historically and in the present day. It is well-known that the Social Work (Scotland) Act brought services together into a generic social work service for the first time. What is less recognised is that there was considerable opposition to this from within the (largely male) probation service; the rest of the UK's decision to keep probation out of social work shows just how strongly views were felt. Our study asks – 50 years on – how did the decision taken in Scotland come about, and how are gender issues played out today in criminal justice social work (CJSW)? The study employed a mixed methods approach involving a review of literature and research, a

national online survey and focus groups. Thematic data analysis followed. The findings throw into question gendered representations of CJSW, past and present. While it is clear that gender remains a significant dimension in CJSW, this is not always in ways that we might expect. Specifically, gender emerges as an inevitable constituent in a workforce that works 'mostly with men'; it is as a key feature of work with those convicted of sexual offences and domestic violence; it can be seen in approaches with women who offend; and finally, it plays out in both workload allocation and career progression. We conclude that CJSW is an important space for understanding gender and social work in Scotland, with scope for more explicit, complex and reflexive engagement with this topic in the future.

## **Exploring the changing nature of adoption work since the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968**

Ariane Critchley, Maggie Grant *Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland*, Polly Cowan *Scottish Adoption* and Mark Hardy *Edinburgh Napier University*

This paper charts changes in the social work role in adoption in Scotland since 1968. Although the Act was not intended to reform adoption practice, it has had two major impacts. The first concerns the process of adoption. Since the majority of adoptions in 1968 were by 'consent', it is unlikely that the engineers of the Children's Hearing system foresaw the role it would have in securing permanence for children. As adoption moved from 'relinquishment' to more complex and contested legal routes, the Children's Hearing began to occupy an integral role in decision making for children in need of care and protection. The second major impact of the Act is in terms of the wider values of social work. Since 1968, adoption has gradually become understood as a resource for children who are unable to remain within the birth family or kinship networks. The welfarist foundations laid by the 1968 Act were instrumental in this process.

Drawing on a combination of documentary analysis of adoption files and interviews with key informants, the research focused on three key periods in the 50-year period; 1968, 1988 and 2014. This revealed increasing fragmentation of the social work role and of adoption records, decreasing the potential for files to be a resource for adopted individuals curious about their origins and story. Paradoxically, over this period there has been an increased understanding of the identity needs of adopted people. Such unintended consequences suggest that the social work role in adoption remains a 'work in progress'.



## **Social Work Scotland Advisory Group to the 1968 Project**

Mike Brown	Treasurer and Secretary, Social Work Scotland
Iona Colvin	Chief Social Work Advisor, Scottish Government
Val De Souza	Chief Officer, South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership
Professor John Devaney	Centenary Chair of Social Work, University of Edinburgh
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